

# Michelle Wilson: Propane Rookie to Industry Champion

One industry leader's journey  
from an internship to a workforce  
development leader

BY KARLI STEMPEL HAIGHT



If you meet Michelle Wilson at a board meeting, on a video chat over Zoom or at a trade show, it only takes a few minutes to see her passion for the propane industry. Once you get to talking, it's even clearer. She's a marketing and financial consultant, active community member and workforce development organizer — and those are just a few of the many hats you'll find her wearing on any given day.

Wilson's career in the propane industry started off as happenstance. After graduating from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in accounting and finance, she began an internship in the accounting department of Boston Environmental LLC in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Boston Environmental serves propane marketers with financial consulting, marketing and risk management services.

On the accounting team, Wilson began to learn the ins and outs of how propane companies conducted their businesses. Over time, she worked her way up to controller at Boston Environmental, and as she started to work more closely with propane marketers, she was gradually drawn out from behind the desk and into the field.

Wilson's transition from accounting to sales in 2009 was a natural one. She is a true people person and thrives in an environment where she can connect with others. Wilson will admit she was still a little nervous at her first trade show, but she quickly found the propane industry to be a dynamic and supportive environment, willing to welcome new professionals. She never looked back.

After that first trade show, things kept rolling. Wilson took every opportunity to attend propane industry events and meet marketers across the Northeast and, eventually, the country.

"I was so fortunate to meet so many incredible people that have motivated me," she said. "I am grateful to have had

industry leaders take me under their wing, like Judy Garber, Bob Boltz and Dan Holohan. Through their mentorship, I was able to grow and learn so much."

For the past 11 years as vice president at Boston Environmental, Wilson's focus has been helping her clients in the propane industry grow their businesses. Her expertise has expanded from accounting and financial consulting to include propane marketing strategy and risk mitigation. And, thanks to many years of stopping into the offices of her clients, catching up with the staff and observing employee training, she has a sharp understanding of what it takes to run a business in the propane industry.

Wilson is an active member of many state and national propane gas associations, including serving as the membership chair of the Women in Propane Council, the membership chair of Women in Energy, and serving on the board of directors for the Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association and the New England Fuel Institute. So, you might be wondering, what exactly is it about the propane industry that turned Wilson's original internship into a lasting career?

"I sort of stumbled my way into this industry, but what hooked me and keeps me coming back for more is the industry's core values," Wilson said. "I get to work with a network of highly talented individuals, and every day is a different opportunity to problem solve, build relationships and evolve."

One of Wilson's recent passion projects is workforce development to secure the next generation of propane professionals. Like many others, she knows all too well how retiring employees and the national hiring shortage has affected propane businesses all over the United States.

"Nearly every company I work with has had — and is having — a tough time finding new talent," she says. "It's a challenge

that isn't going away and requires attention and action now."

In 2019, Wilson played an integral role in establishing GeneratioNext Propane Pros, a workforce development program committed to helping propane marketers find qualified job candidates through local trade, commercial driver's license (CDL) and vocational schools. Today, state associations across the country use this program, and hundreds of marketers and applicants use the online platform to post and apply for jobs.

Wilson leads the program's student and marketer outreach, traveling to CDL and trade schools to highlight the benefits of a career in the propane industry.

At every presentation, she brings a representative from a local propane company with her so the students and instructors can hear firsthand success stories from the industry, learn about various career paths and meet with potential employers.

These outreach sessions are not only great for the students, but they also allow propane marketers a unique opportunity to meet with potential candidates and build relationships with schools to fill internships, apprenticeships and full-time employment positions. In 2020, GeneratioNext Propane Pros partnered with another workforce development program,

Vets2Techs, to further expand their reach to help propane marketers find even more qualified applicants within the veteran community, bringing the industry the most comprehensive workforce development program.

"I'm excited to see how far we've come with workforce development and how much more we can do," Wilson said. "A lot of students and their instructors have little-to-no knowledge of the propane industry and all the opportunities it has to offer. Going into a classroom, I am able to show them that there aren't just jobs available — there are careers with competitive pay, valuable benefits and real opportunities for them."

When Wilson is not traveling to meet with students and instructors, she works directly with state association leaders and propane marketers to support their hiring and employee retention efforts.

"It's fulfilling to help the same network of people that welcomed me with open arms to find employees that aren't just qualified, but excited and driven to join the propane industry." 🍷

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